

# CANADIAN ARCTIC

## Four months with the Inuit

CANADIAN ARCTIC

....That morning I was reading "The Mysterious People of the Ice", a book by the famous Italian explorer Silvio Zavatti. A black and white photograph attracted my attention: a child aged about four dressed in clothes made of reindeer leather and sealskin. I examined it for over a quarter of an hour. The next day I decided to leave for the Arctic. I wanted to live with the Inuit for a certain period, I wanted to immerse myself in their lifestyle and leave mine for a while. That wise and ancient people would certainly be able to teach me something. The horizons of my little world would have become limitless and I would have been able to roam in my new freedom.... But Iqviq was so different from what I expected. When I arrived, the village consisted of prefabricated wooden houses provided with every kind of comfort" .... [Geos - April 1994]

Nobody knows with any certainty where the Inuit come from. It is thought they are descended from a group of hunters and fishermen who arrived in northern America from the Asiatic regions around 10,000 years ago. The Inuit (their present name, meaning "the men"), known to us as Eskimos (ancient derisive name given to them by the Indians which in the local tongue means "eaters of raw meat"), live in the extreme north of the earth, in the Arctic regions; this immense, hostile territory has a very harsh climate. They were once completely nomadic and had no contact with the western world. They living off hunting and fishing and their only goal was survival. When the white men arrived there and discovered they could become rich by extracting the minerals and exploiting the animals of these zones, the Inuit started to change. In what way? The first and most important change was that their active life was replaced by a sedentary existence. It will seem strange to you, but because of this simple detail the Inuit are no longer Inuit. What does this mean?

I lived with the Inuit of Quebec, the northernmost region of Canada for four months. I slept in their homes and shared the monotonous and restricted life of the villages, no longer made up of igloos, but of prefabricated, centrally-heated wooden houses. But I also went hunting with them, encountering polar bears, seals, walruses, white whales and caribou, moving from the tundra in summer to the boundless expanses of ice in the winter. I listened to what they told me as I joined in their activities and I puzzled over the reasons for their sadness. In despair, they continued to ask me "Am I an Inuit or am I a white man?" And you could see an inner turmoil in their eyes, as you can well understand from



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the story of Peter Iyaituk, one of my Inuit friends in the village of Ivujivik. "I was sure that the life I lived was right for me, I was sure that everything which my father had taught me for years was true, was absolute: group solidarity, fidelity of man and wife, the sense of commitment in everyday life. I never set myself the problem of the existence of other values, of another truth. I had always been happy with my family. I have never needed money, my grandfather never worked to earn, he hunted for us because we needed to eat and protect ourselves from the cold. We didn't have to pay anyone. Today, for example, we can hunt more rapidly with motor-sleds, but to buy one you have to work and, moreover, if it breaks down in the middle of a snowstorm, it's certain death. Our dogs instead always brought us back home, we never had problems and they didn't cost anything. Time was not so important for us, we didn't have clocks, we followed the seasons. Now, thanks to technology, we have discovered that everything can be done much faster: at the time I enjoy the speed, but then when I return to the village with my catch and enter my house I feel sad and unsatisfied. I feel that everything I do is no longer indispensable. I have an infinity of time, but I don't understand the sense of my life. My son doesn't like whale meat, he prefers biscuits and chocolate. So who do I go hunting for? We have super-markets now. When I do happen to go out for a turn with my dogs, I get immense pleasure from the silence and I feel good in challenging nature, but if I use them to go hunting I feel stupid because I know that the motor-sled exists. What voice should I follow? There are many situations in which I feel torn between two opposite alternatives. I feel half a man."

## DEBATE

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To survive, the first living creatures learnt to adapt to these different features of the land. This is how variety was created, spontaneously. In every form of life.

I want to imagine a moment, in the history of the world, in which different creatures could live peacefully together.

Perhaps the deterioration of this garden of harmony began as people evolved and no longer had only to worry about surviving. They found they had the time to consider their differences as something to vaunt and use as a form of power...

Dear children,

Do you like the fact that there are many populations different from yours in the world?

Why do you like it or not like it?

How do you think these populations are "different"?

Do these differences make you afraid or do they make you curious?

Is a "different" person less important than you and your usual friends?

How would you react if an Inuit child were to enter your class now? What would you tell him or her? What would you ask him or her about?

# THE AMAZON BASIN

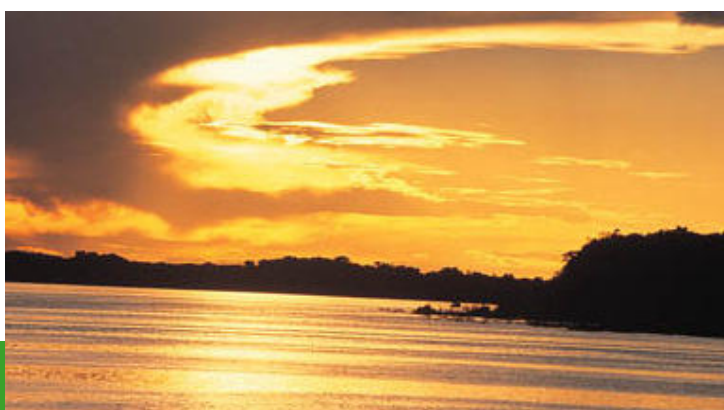
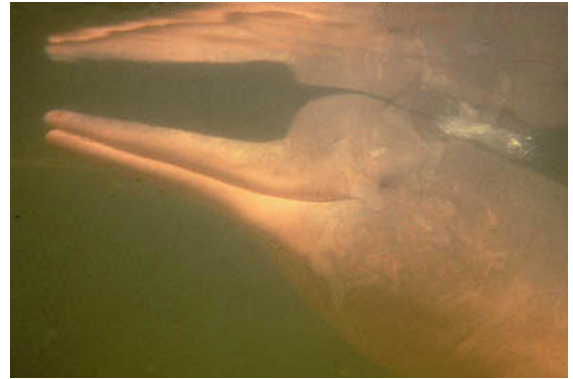
## In search of the pink dolphin

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65 million years ago the Platanistidae, the present river dolphins, lived in the Thethys, an immense tropical sea covering today's continents. They swam among the gentle waves, now and

then leaping out of the water, just as the sea dolphins do. But one day the sea dried up and the land emerged. The survivors of the Platanistidae family, once very prolific, were the only ones who managed to adapt to the difficult life of the river. Today there are only four genera left: the Lipotes in China, the Platanista in India, the Inia and the Pontoporia in Brazil. The Inia geoffrensis lives in the Amazon River. At a talk given by Professor Pilleri, the internationally famous expert on fresh-water dolphins, I was fascinated by the fact that the "boto" as the Brazilians call it, is a pink dolphin with strange features. I decided to leave for the Amazon to find that strange animal. But in Manaus, before tracking him down, I ran up against enormous obstacles in organising the expedition...! As always, I had started from nothing, from a bizarre desire and an insatiable curiosity. I remained in the capital of the Amazonas state for over three months. I just had enough money to live on. I certainly couldn't pay for the boat, crew, petrol, food and fishermen able to indicate suitable places for my search. Not to mention equipment for creating a natural bay for a dolphin to live in for a few days and a helicopter to take the aerial photos indispensable for the article I would have written on my return to Italy. There would be 15 people participating in the trip. At that time I did not belong to an organisation which could

... "The river took us over. After so many problems it was a real pleasure to enjoy the silence of nature, the perfume of the flowers, the gentle rocking of the water as we penetrated into the deep heart of this vivid green forest. We were surrounded by the infinite. The immensity of the sky, the majestic foliage of the trees, the freedom of the Amazon River infiltrating everywhere, spreading its arms in an intricate, boundless labyrinth... Its impetuous charge towards the sea, where finally it would be reunited with all its universe... And our boat...so small, but accepted and respected by this imposing environment" ... [No Limits - April 1993]



# A M A Z O N I A

have helped me out with money. I would have had to provide for everything myself, although I didn't know anything about river sailing... And the Amazon River certainly wasn't just any river! In the end I managed to obtain everything I needed with a special form of barter...

So one month later, I finally found myself swimming with "Legal", the dolphin, in a beautiful natural bay along the Rio Tapajos. I was to remain there for eighteen days, learning about the particularities which distinguished him from the sea dolphins. One afternoon I gently grasped his dorsal fin and put my left hand under his stomach. He flicked his tail and set off. I relaxed my body, closed my eyes and, using the only points of contact I had and being very careful about his pectoral fins, I gave myself over to his sinuous movements.

Then the researchers of the National Research Institute of the Amazon, who were marking him as part of a census they were carrying out, let him back into the great river... It was sunset as his small shape slowly disappeared over the horizon.

In Brazil the dolphin of the Amazon River has become famous not only for the colour of its skin, but also for a curious legend originating among the Indians of the forests. Over the years, the story has had many versions. Today, the people of the Amazon basin recount that:

"... in the evening, the "boto" is transformed into a handsome man dressed all in white and wearing a black hat. You always meet him at parties and the women, seduced by his magical fascination, fall madly in love with him and become pregnant. This enchanted being then turns back into a dolphin again and mysteriously disappears".

Many really believe in this tale, but others use it to conceal extramarital "affairs": "It was the dolphin! It's all his fault... he gave me this child one night!" the women often say to their husbands. And if they're lucky, nothing more is said and the new baby becomes one of the family.

But because of this legend, in the Amazon basin most people feel a little frightened of the strange pink animal. They respect it, fear it and keep away from it. So the fresh-water dolphin of the Amazon River is not hunted as it is in India and China where it now risks extinction.



# THE AMAZON BASIN

## Noah's Park

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It has always been difficult to stop the illegal trade of animals in the Amazon basin. According to IBAMA, the Brazilian institute for the defence of the environment, the problem is not so much finding and arresting the traders but the difficulties arising after confiscation. Where do you take the numerous animal species, almost always ill and weak and thus unable to live in freedom in their natural habitat? Returning them to nature would mean their certain death. But who can take care of them? You have to stop treating confiscation from a legal aspect alone and give it the wider scope of the protection of animals in extinction.



For this you need an organisation which ensures that the animals regain their health before returning them to the forest. It is not easy to tackle the numerous problems which inevitably arise when one is dealing with hundreds of animals of every age and species. Especially when the area involved is the inhospitable Amazon forest and when

the government is the first to be reluctant about allocating funds for this purpose.

Marc van Roosmalen, a Dutch biologist specialising in primates, has on his own initiative created a "Noah's Park", an extensive green area near to Manaus. Over 15 types of monkeys, parrots, otters, snakes and other rare examples of Brazilian fauna, rescued from the traders by IBAMA, are taken care of here. Marco, long involved with INPA (National Research Institute of the Amazon Basin), has with his wife Betty and two children undertaken this noble feat, unique in the world.



His success and recognition are the result of much hard work and a constant presence of spirit. The choice this Noah of 2000 has made will perhaps be considered a little old-fashioned by all those ecologists who rely on



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words rather than actions... And yet, thanks to his little big "ark", Noah is saving a great deal of nature.

## DEBATE

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"When I'm big I'll be...."

How many of us has uttered these words at least once!

But how many of us have kept faith with that child's voice when grown up?

One day we suddenly wake up in the real world and discover that we have taken a completely different road from what our inclination suggested.

As we grow up, a thousand external voices threaten our truth. When it comes to making a choice, the world is always ready to confuse us.

Often we are left holding just a few pieces of that truth which has by now been shattered.... Buried among our secret desires, our old dream has been put away for ever.

Dear children,

What do you want to do when you grow up?

Will you still manage to see your dream clearly?

What external factors do you think threaten your dream?

What characteristics do you think young people need to make their dreams come true in today's world?

Why is it important to follow our inclination and do what is most natural to us?



PACIFIC

# Raleigh International:

## Three months on board of the brig Zebu sailing with the whole world in the pacific ocean

When I was 18 I was in love with the sea. I always felt free when I thought of its boundless space. There was a mysterious peace in its continual, tireless motion... I was very keen on sailing and



... "Ten downs and ten sunsets before finally calling at Guam, in the Mariana Islands, on 20 January 1987, the last stage in a long dialogue with the sea, shared with a group offering multiple cultures, features, traditions and, above all, different viewpoints, albeit all turned towards the same horizon... On this route you can find the smiling canoe of the child from the Solomon islands, the boat of the old diver of Truk, the ships of the soldiers from Guam and finally our square-sailed vessel driven by the winds of seven countries, but guided by the wave of a single sea..." (Nautica - May 1987)



going underwater with breathing apparatus. When I passed Raleigh International's screening they gave me a list of itineraries to choose from. I decided on the Pacific Ocean. Twenty-two of us left from Australia on board an old, 25-metre sailing ship, the brig Zebu, to explore the Melanesia, Caroline and Mariana Islands. I had never been in a sailing ship before but

I was sure that the

sea would not disappoint me. Men and women, in shifts, were to sail this majestic vessel with its 15 sails and 105 ropes. The sailing course started immediately, the same day

we arrived in the port of Cairns from all over the world. In the beginning we concentrated on the physical endurance tests we had to undergo; our silent and heroic fatigue separated us and united us. Then, as we worked together, we gradually adapted to the new conditions and our tensions dissolved in a marvellous rapport. Liberating, uniting and genuine. Every evening under the stars - how close they seemed - we recounted the stories of our lives as we sailed along, rocked by the sea. We discovered, accepted, and respected each other for what we were. No longer heroes or



heroines. Ordinary people on this earth. On this sea. It was strange, but from then on, the colours of the sky and water, the sea-gulls, the dolphins, the wind, every



inhabitant of the islands and Venus at dawn, began truly to exist. Clear and limpid. No longer covered by the complicated and tortuous shadows of our mind...

### **RALEIGH INTERNATIONAL**

Founded in London in 1984 under the patronage of Prince Charles to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the British landing in America, Raleigh International was meant to last four years. But the excellent results prompted its founders, the explorer John Blashford Snell and an international team of scientists, to extend it for a lifetime.

What does it involve?

Following in the steps of the explorer Walter Raleigh, young people from all over the world, between 17 and 25 years of age, take part in three-month expeditions to the furthest corners of our planet. These voyages, under the banner of environmental protection and community aid to needy populations, help young people to evolve in many ways. They gain greater self-confidence, discovering skills they never knew they possessed, and understand and accept their limits. They learn to work with people from every country, every culture and every social class... They thus begin to realise that they are part of the universe and no longer the most important person in the small world from which they come. The adventure offered to young people by the founders of Raleigh International constitutes a preparation for the much longer and more difficult adventure of life. Enthusiasm, curiosity, courage, willingness to adapt and a good pinch of humility are indispensable for beginning. All the rest then follows naturally.

No particular qualification is needed to participate in Raleigh International. The initiative is open to all if you are aged between 17 and 25 years and speak English. You must also pass the physical and psychological aptitude tests of Raleigh International's Italian Committee and, finally, find a sponsor willing to pay £2,200 and the air ticket to reach the destination chosen by the participant.

More detailed information on how to participate in Raleigh International will be provided during the talk.

### **DEBATE**

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"That's the way I am.."

What peace, what immense freedom, in feeling that we have the right to be simply ourselves!

We conceal our real selves for fear of being judged, we always want to appear perfect. We keep searching, often all our life, for how we should be....

But then, if we truly love life and are tired of telling lies, we are born a second time...

Exploring the dusty corner of our minds, we smile at ourselves and there stowed away right at the bottom, we recognise our old masks, gently swinging in the emptiness....

Dear children,

What can we do to know ourselves?

What fears do we have to overcome to manage to accept and love ourselves?

Isn't perhaps feeling comfortable with yourself the first step towards being able to feel comfortable with others?

What influence does an individual's inner development have on the society in which he or she lives?



# Mongolia: 6 months with the nomads of the steppe

Mongolia is five times as large as Italy and has a population of two and a half million inhabitants, of whom 900,000 are still nomad shepherds who move with their camel caravans at least fifteen times a year in search of new pastures or water for their animals.

In the eastern steppe, the last great uncontaminated prairie on this planet, the grass is like the sea, full of waves and energy. The eye is attracted and follows its rhythm up to the sky, replete with a vivid, satisfying green or with a joyful golden yellow. In the wind, the one that comes from Siberia, the sound of our horses' hooves as they stride along is lost in the emptiness. A profound emptiness. Days and days without meeting a single soul. At sunset, a mysterious dark line moves slowly across the horizon. The nomads of Dornod move with long caravans of wagons pulled by camels. A moment later and my frantic race to meet them would have been in vain. The camels have longer legs and the voice of the wind in Mongolia is stronger than the human one... [Gulliver - August 2001]

Goats, sheep, yaks, camels and horses, ranging from a few hundreds to several thousands, provide them with meat, milk, wool and cashmere (that they sell mainly to China) and constitute the only wealth which these proud, wandering horsemen are prepared to fight for. "Wouldn't you like to go and live in the city?" In the six months I spent living with the nomads in the different regions of

Mongolia I never heard anyone give a convinced affirmative to this question. The nomads are very curious about life in Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia, since most of them have never set foot there. But, despite the free-market system introduced in the country since 1992, after 300 years of Chinese and 70 years of Soviet domi-

nation, this curiosity hasn't yet become an actual attraction: "What about my animals? How could I take them with me?" – they all asked me. I didn't know how to reply. The nomad's strong link with his livestock is a deep sentiment

which can often astonish and disconcert you when you come up against it. The children learn to ride almost before they learn to walk and by the age of three they can all sit in the saddle by themselves. The nomads have a special rela-



relationship with the horse, *mori*, almost a symbiosis, and this has not altered despite all the changes in society. Often you earn a Mongol nomad's respect if you show respect for his horse (a descendant of the *Equus Prjevalskii* of which only a few specimens remain).

In Mongolia you meet on average two inhabitants every square kilometre. The lowest population density in the world. If you're not prepared for it, the great emptiness of Mongolia can bewilder even the most expert traveller: to the north there is the taiga, to the south the Gobi desert, to the west the Altai mountains and from here, to the east as far as you can see, only steppe, steppe and steppe.... Overhead and all around a boundless sky. Always blue. Deep blue. Blinding. You can't hide from it, you can't escape it. You can't deceive it. And the eternal sun. No cloud in sight, no shade. It shows up everything and everyone. The proud nature of the Mongols is forged in this fundamental element, this immense and hostile space. The horsemen of the steppe capably face its challenge every day enduring temperatures that can easily drop to 50° below zero.

If you happen to glimpse something on the horizon it's almost always a gher, the Mongols' typical, round tent. Let's go in. The guest's place is to the north, opposite the entrance which always faces south. The women sit to the east, where the kitchen utensils are, and the men to the east, where they keep their guns. In the middle of the gher the great stove puffs smoke into the sky through the *toghona*, the central hole from which light also enters. Every morning old *Tungalagtuya*, a beautiful woman's name which means "bright sunrays", throws a spoonful of milk to the sky and one to the ground. She is following the Shamanic rite and blessing a new day.

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